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ABSTRACT

This paper comments on some of the possible uses and values of the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI), an instrument by which a college community can delineate institutional goals and establish priorities among them. In the practical sense, the establishment of institutional goals is an essential element in any kind of systematic institutional planning, which most institutions are now being compelled to do as they find resources to be increasingly limited. A second practical use of institutional goals inheres in institutional evaluation activities, which may be carried on for purposes of internal improvement and as a basis for rendering account to external agencies and interests. Ideologically, institutional goals can represent the basic principles of institutional policy, the basics of an institution's self-conception, and the philosophy that can pervade the college and give coherence to all its operations. (HS)

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COLLEGE GOALS: PRACTICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL USES[1]

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Elsewhere I've described an instrument by which a college community can delineate institutional goals and establish priorities among them.[2] The aim in this short paper is to comment briefly on some of the possible uses and values that information from the instrument, the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI), can have on the campus.

It should be said first that raw data from the Inventory should usually have rather little direct value. Instead, IGI results, variously analyzed and organized, may be used as a data base for wide-ranging deliberations about what the college wants to stand for. They could serve as a springboard from which to forge, in new language, in language other than that of the IGI, a conception of institutional goals that can attract wide acceptance on the campus. It would be advantageous to try to conceive goals at both a broad, somewhat philosophic level, and also at a lower level of specificity--as "outcomes"--stated, when possible, in operational or measurable terms. Definitions at both levels will have uses.

Practical Uses

Clearly defined goals, at both the "philosophic" and "outcome" levels of abstraction, are an essential element in any kind of systematic institutional planning, which most institutions are now being compelled to do as

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[1]Portion of a talk given at AAHE's National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, March 8, 1972

[2]R. E. Peterson. College Goals and the Challenge of Effectiveness. Princeton, N.J., Educational Testing Service, 1971.

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they find resources to be increasingly limited. Few colleges can now afford to do all the things they would like to do, or once did. Choices have to be made among alternative futures. How can such decisions--for example, to cut back the athletic or the library acquisition program--be sensible, be intelligent, unless they are guided by understandings about institutional goals.

For example, many institutions are thinking about things like non-traditional study, the expanded campus, external degrees, and so forth. It seems to me that if an (accepted) element of an institution's mission is to grant as many degrees as possible, at the least cost and greatest convenience to people, then the external degrees and so on make sense. However, if the institution decided at some time that it is interested in changing peoples beliefs about themselves, society or learning in some way, it may be good to have the people on campus for some number of years.

A second rather practical use of institutional goals inheres in institutional evaluation activities, which may be carried on for purposes of internal improvement, and/or as a basis for rendering account to external agencies and interests. Evaluation, or evaluation of institutional effectiveness, as an activity--an institutional renewal activity, at its best--is most sensibly understood, it seems to me, as determination of the extent to which acknowledged college goals and program objectives are being achieved. Thus far, systematic evaluation of institutions and component programs is rare in higher education. This all may be changing though, as state legislatures seek criteria for allocating limited resources, and as accrediting organizations press for new assessment models. As with planning, which makes no sense without knowing what the college wishes to achieve, evaluation activities lack focus in the absence of specified objectives.

These are but two kinds of activities in which carefully conceived goals may be useful, if not essential. It would seem, however, if one pushed the point far enough, that almost any decision makes sense only if taken with regard to institutional goals. Decisions to hire, promote, give tenure to faculty, for example, could be based, one could argue, on an estimate of contribution to the realization of college goals. Whether a statewide governing board should allow College X to launch a new engineering school, or construct a new science building, could turn on a conception of purposes for the state system. And so forth.

Ideological Purposes

Beyond, and perhaps more important than such pragmatic uses, institutional goals can have what I'll call ideological uses. Maybe they could be called normative uses, as sociologists use that word. By ideological, I mean that an accepted conceptualization of institutional goals can represent the basic principles of institutional policy, the basics of an institution's self-conception, the philosophy that can pervade the college and give coherence to all its operations. Consensus on basic goals can be like an expression of the common interest, which could be the foundation for easy communication, cooperation and trust, as well as for commitment, pride and joy in the work of the institution. A shared ideology can turn a collection of rugged individuals into a honest-to-God community.

A lot of words? And did I say "consensus"? Which many will say is probably unobtainable on most campuses, and not even necessarily desirable--in that it would seem to mean an end to controversy and excitement.

I don't mean 100%, down-the-line, group-think consensus. What I mean is general agreement among people associated with the college about its basic

goals. What does the institution stand for? For teaching and learning only? For research, also? For educating an elite, or for trying to educate all the classes? For teaching and learning only in the liberal arts, or for the practical arts as well? For the intellectual development of young people, or for development of the whole person in some sense?

By all means, I'm not suggesting there be consensus about means, that there be orthodoxy about how to teach and how to organize the curricula. I am suggesting that there is value in consensus about basic ends. Reed, Antioch, and Swarthmore, judging from Burton Clark's book[3], at various times in their histories fit this description, and at various times they stood among the finest schools the country has known. They represent a model worth aspiring to today. Why? Because consider the alternatives.

With no illusions about oversimplifying, let me delineate three models of institutional functioning--which may be called (1) the consensual/community model, (2) the conflict/interest group model, and (3) the apathy or knuckling-under model. I wouldn't know what the numbers of each might be, but I think I do know that the conflict model, which assumes more or less legitimate differences between competing interests and the use of formalized adversary procedures to resolve the differences, applies to an increasing number of institutions. Most educational theorists and statesmen --Clark Kerr, for example, included-- regard the conflict model as the most valid way of thinking about the situation now, and that it will be even more valid in the years just ahead.

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[3]The Destinctive College: Antioch, Reed and Swarthmore. Chicago: Aldine, 1970.

What does acceptance of conflict assumptions mean for the life and work of the campus? To what extent, one wonders, does teaching and learning get sidetracked when professors, administrators, even students are caught up in all kinds of adversary activities? Can faculty and administrators really enjoy their work under such a regime. (I imagine quite a few do.) The conflict model requires that college leaders be experts in conflict management or resolution, rather than educational leaders, or innovators, or something else (fund-raisers, perhaps). It assumes, as I said, the necessity for formalized procedures for orderly resolution of differences (as opposed to more informal methods); and what are the costs in time and money for such procedures? What does this kind of routinization do to creativity and spontaneity, to an institution's capacity to quickly give green lights to people wanting to try new things?

Recently, before a committee of the state legislature, I heard a ranking official in the California State Colleges system say in so many words that the colleges in his system are usually unable to agree on really anything they want to do, and that in consequence the central office is unilaterally making various policies for the component campuses. This man had given up on participatory decision-making, because, in his words, it takes too much time to get agreement.

The implications of this state of affairs are staggering. Not all the blame falls on the campuses, to be sure. But, nevertheless, here are intelligent men and women who seem unable to rise above their differences, or out of their apathy, in order to help formulate that educational policies that effect their day-to-day work as professionals. Divided, they are falling.

So you can see I think that the most common alternative to consensus and community, namely, the institutionalization of conflict, is unfortunate. I'm guessing that its ascendancy will be temporary, that as the economy, the academic job market, and public attitudes towards professors all improve, faculties will see less need to dig in to protect their interests. Maybe some will even see the value in working to build consensus around basic college goals.

For all the reasons I've touched on, and more -- both practical and ideological -- the time spent on a campus getting people together about basic institutional goals and purposes strikes this observer as rather more than merely "an exercise for administrators".[4]

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[4]The title given the panel at the AAHE meeting.